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LOOKING FOR ANCESTORS

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It is appropriate to recall the words of Thackeray,- "I think every man would like to come of an ancient and honorable race. As you like your father to be an honorable man, why not your grandfather and his ancestors before him?" And Edmund Burke added his word, "He only deserves to be remembered by posterity who treasures up and preserves the history of his ancestry."

The study of genealogy can become a most interesting hobby. One not only learns about his own family, but he picks up considerable history and finds many interesting items regarding the life and customs of the past. When I was a youngster my parents had some forty cousins who called on us at various times. It was very confusing to know where so many came into the relationship of cousin, and in self-defense I had to work out a chart, or a sort of family tree, with the names as the branches. Then when I heard new names I could look on the chart and understand who they were.

Genealogical Charts

There are two methods of making genealogical charts, depending upon whether one is more interested in the family in general, or in his own direct ancestors.

In the first type, one starts with the name of the original ancestor of the family and writes down all that can be found out regarding his life. Then the names of his children and the record of each, with all dates and places as far as can be determined. Then the names of the grandchildren in the same way, with dates and places for each one. By the time one reaches the end of the list, in the year 1946, there will be a full family history of several thousand names. This will be a record of which every one in the family might well be proud, even though each living person would find less than ten names of his direct ancestors.

The second type of chart* is for one most interested in ancestors. One starts with his own name and writes down a brief record of his life, with all appropriate dates and places. In this connection it is

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*Attached is a suggested form for this type of genealogical chart. If there should be sufficient demand for extra copies of this page, they can be supplied at cost. Call Miss Smithe at Ann Arbor 2-2501 with requests.

very important to record volume and page in the County or State vital records where dates of birth and marriage are recorded. Probably you know these dates yourself, but the official reference is necessary to make the story complete and authentic. Next, one writes in the names of his parents and fills out the record for each. The names of all their children should be included as part of their history. Dates and places here are, of course, very important. It is not necessary to obtain official certificates of their births and marriage, but the volume and page where these are recorded in the County or State office should be cited. Do not be discouraged if at first you cannot find all the information you desire. Leave space to record this later when it may be discovered.

After the two parents, there are the four grandparents. Their names are each written at the tops of four separate pages, and on these are recorded all the information that can be obtained about them. In some cases very little can be found, but now there are four lines to work on, and surely something can be discovered regarding one or more of them. Whenever something does come to light, his page is now ready for entering the new data. After the grandparents, there are the great-grandparents,- eight of them. Surely among so many there will be several lines where the record can be filled in on the same form that has been already set up.

In all my own records I write only on every other line. This leaves space below each statement, date, or place to write in the source of the information, whatever this may be. Where the same source is repeatedly cited, an abbreviation or symbol can be made use of, with full name of the source supplied at the bottom of the page or the beginning of the file. This is not a fantastic idea, but one that has been forced upon me in the collection of family records. Oftentimes these references are of more value than the bit of information that is obtained from them. One never knows who may use these records in years to come, or who may need to consult the original sources. In fact, after the lapse of time and collection of considerable data, one cannot remember the source of all the information that has been collected. When later information seems to contradict what was at first considered correct, it is necessary to consult the first source again and compare it critically with the new information. An example of the usefulness of these references was a case where I had two dates of birth for a certain man. Both agreed on the day and the month, but one was 1854 and the other 1858. One record was from the family Bible of the man himself, the other from the Office of Vital Records at the Trenton, New Jersey, State House. Knowing the sources, I knew where to begin the search for further information.

Sources of Information

There are many and varied means by which information on the older generations may be found. Often there is a family Bible in which records have been kept. Cemetery stones give valuable information which usually is correct as far as it goes. If this is copied it should be taken down, line for line, just as it appears on the stone and filed with the sheet on which the data is entered. The location of the

stone in the cemetery and on the lot may be helpful to the searcher.

It is always a pleasure when one can find a published genealogy of the family. Among the eight names you now have in the third generation, there is a good chance of finding such a published record, either a complete book or in the family histories that are published by genealogical societies. "Now, though you find such a line in print, you must be very careful about accepting it as correct in every detail. Not everything that glitters is gold, and not everything that is printed is true, in spite of popular belief. Genealogies are compiled and published, sometimes at great expense, by all sorts of people. Some of these records are reliable and trustworthy, some of them are filled with glaring errors. A beautifully printed genealogy, elaborately bound in tooled leather, may be full of mistakes and almost worthless, or even worse than that, grossly misleading. Another family history, printed on cheap paper from worn type, may prove to be notable for its accuracy."* If you find it stated that a man is born six years after the date of his father's death, you should use the book with caution, although even so it may still be found useful for your purposes to a degree.

Recorded deeds of the transfer of property, as well as recorded wills in the Probate Office, often contain revealing information on family relationships, as when a man deeds his house to "my beloved son John," or provides in a will that in case John is not living, it shall go to "James, the oldest son of my deceased daughter Sarah."

If one has ancestors in Massachusetts, there are printed volumes of births, marriages, and deaths for most of the towns of that state from the earliest times down to the year 1850, as set down by the Town Clerk. A set of these volumes is in the University of Michigan Library.

In Connecticut, a man who was interested in the vital records of his state has copied these records from the books of the various towns (or townships) onto cards, over a million of them, which are now in a single alphabetical file in the State Library at Hartford. A typewritten copy of these cards, in over 130 volumes, is in the Library of the New England Historic-Genealogical Society in Boston. A hundred volumes of the Register of this Society is in our own University Library.

A similar undertaking has been carried out for the towns of New Hampshire and Vermont, and the collected records can be consulted in the State Houses at Concord and Montpelier. Another set of 75 volumes pertaining especially to New York history is the record of the New York Genealogical and Biographical Society. This is also in our Library.

If one is looking for ancestors who were in the American Revolution, it is helpful to consult the 166 volumes of Lineage Books of the D. A. R., which contain 166,000 lineages.

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*Searching for your ancestors, by Gilbert Harry Doane. N.Y., c 1937.

If one is interested in Quaker families, there are five large volumes of the Encyclopedia of American Genealogy, compiled by W.W. Hinshaw and published by Edwards Brothers here in Ann Arbor.

Most of the states have kept records of births, marriages, and deaths for the past hundred years, and complete information on these state records is given in 33 pages of volume 90 of the New England Historical and Genealogical Register. Also we must not forget the seven large volumes of the Compendium of American Genealogy published by the American Institute of Genealogy in Chicago, which contains the ancestral lines of many thousands of Americans.

The first census of the United States was made in 1790, and is the only one that has been printed. It gives the names of only the heads of families and the number of sons and daughters, with their ages. This is useful in checking ancestors who were living in that period. While a single glimpse at a family may not give much information, the use of successive census reports at ten-year intervals often leads to the construction of the entire family life.* For example, one can fix the approximate date of death by noting when a man's name disappears from the census list; it is likely that the family moved to a new home when a name disappears in one town and appears in another; and it may be assumed that sons have married and set up homes of their own when the number of children listed are fewer and new family entries appear. The census of 1850 is especially useful as it gives for the first time the name of each person in the family. Since the place of birth is also recorded, the migrations of a family can easily be traced.

Double Dates

"A stumbling block for many an ancestor hunter, when he attempts to check the dates of his forebears, is a mysterious discrepancy of either a few days or a year which throws out his calculation. If this does not arise, then the double date which he finds in some old records may cause him to wonder why those who made the contemporary record did not know whether the child was born in 1701 or 1702... These double dates in the old records occur only in January, February, or March, and never later than 1752."**

Mr. Doane proceeds to explain this situation, from which we freely quote: This system of double dating arose as a result of a change made in the calendar in 1582. Before that date the year was divided into 365 days plus an extra day every four years. It was found that this year was 11 minutes too long, and this discrepancy amounted to 10 days by 1582. Therefore, Pope Gregory ordered that 10 days be dropped out of the calendar, and also one leap-year day every 400 years. Moreover, the year was to begin on January 1 instead of on March 25. All Catholic countries adopted this system in 1582, but conservative England and her colonies refused to follow suit for 170

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*All census records since 1790 are available only in manuscript form, and may be consulted at the Census Bureau, Department of Commerce, in Washington.

**Searching for your ancestors, by Gilbert Harry Doane. N.Y., c 1937.

years. When England did change, in 1752, there were 11 days to be dropped from the calendar. Thus, George Washington was born on the 11th of February by the old calendar, which is the 22nd of February on the new calendar.

During this interval of 170 years many people wrote both the old and the new date to be doubly sure of the record. The change in the beginning of the year makes the most confusion. The beginner feels that he must question many old records, as for example when he finds that a man is married in April, 1720, and his first child is born in February, 1720, the same year and ten months later.

Index Charts

Before one has gone very far in collecting family records, he will feel the need of a good graphic index scheme to organize and tie together the information that is accumulating. A simple form of such chart is shown here.

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                                  ┌Grandfather  11
                     ┌Father-------┤
                     │            └Grandmother  12
Name ---------┤
                     │
                     │            ┌Grandfather  13
                     └Mother-------┤
                                  └Grandmother  14
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On the first line is your own name (if you are the person whose ancestry is being looked up). There follow the names of your father and mother, and next the names of your four grandparents. If the sheet is large enough the names of the eight great-grandparents could be included. In any case, one soon comes to the edge of the paper. The first chart is No. 1. At the right-hand edge this same No. 1 is placed at the end of each line, with the addition of as many numerals as are needed on the page you have set up, making the numbers read 11, 12, 13, 14, etc. When the index chart is expanded, the four new pages are given these numbers, each one starting with one grandparent. Thus, the chart of Grandfather 11 will end at the right-hand edge with great-great-grandparents numbered 111, 112, 113, 114, etc. These in turn will be expanded on four new charts starting with those numbers, the first one ending with 1111, 1112, etc. When these index charts are all assembled in numerical sequence, the various families forming a direct line of succession are brought together in their natural relationships.

One advantage in this form of chart is that, when filled out back to the time of the Mayflower, there will be about 1000 names on it, and <u>you</u> (if the line being worked out is your own) are vitally interested in every person whose name appears. Every one is an ancestor of yours, and if he had died as a child you would not be here today.

Ann Arbor, Michigan
November 27, 1946

No. _____

Name _____

(Reference _____

Son of _____ and _____

(Ref.) _____

Born in _____ (date) _____

(Ref.) _____

Died in _____ (date) _____

(Ref.) _____

Married in _____ (date) _____

(Ref.) _____

Name of wife _____

(Ref.) _____

Daughter of _____ and _____

(Ref.) _____

Born in _____ (date) _____

(Ref.) _____

Died in _____ (date) _____

Family residence at _____

(Ref.) _____

Occupation _____

(Ref.) _____

Children: (Name) (Born in) (Reference)

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

4. _____

(See over for more)

Bibliographic references: